

(U//FOUO) History Today - 22 February 2008

Run Dates: 02/22/2008 , 02/23/2008 , 02/24/2008



(U) *Cryptologic Films that Never Won an Oscar: Alfred Hitchcock's The Lady Vanishes.*

(U) In this 1938 film, a young British woman, returning home by train through Europe from an unnamed but sinister Balkan country, meets a seemingly scatterbrained older lady in the dining car. They are joined by an obnoxious young British musicologist who has been studying folk music and dance in the region. The older lady hums a tune for them, and tells them that the music must reach British authorities.

(U) The older lady disappears, and the train staff denies that any such person was aboard at all. The musicologist and his friend must look for clues to prove that they had not hallucinated their dining car encounter.

(U) It gives nothing away to say that the music was an encrypted message for the British government from its intelligence sources in Eastern Europe. This is what Hitchcock called a "McGuffin," i.e., the excuse that sets the plot in motion.

(U) Although the movie isn't heavy on cryptology, the subject provides an interesting background for a suspenseful "popcorn" film.

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